

# REAL OPPONENTS TO THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

Says Mr. BOK

ARE THE WOMEN THEMSELVES  
WHOSE PECULIAR FIELD OF WORK LIES  
OUTSIDE OF POLITICS

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PROBABLY few men in the United States have had better opportunities to form an opinion on the question of woman suffrage than Mr. Edward W. Bok. As editor of 'The Ladies' Home Journal' he has been studying woman for many years—studying her wants, her ambitions, her recipes for content. This general course of study alone would entitle Mr. Bok to be considered an authority on anything appertaining to the American woman of to-day. But, in addition to his general observations, he has made a particularly close study of the suffrage question. He has investigated it all over the United States. He has received hundreds of letters from women who are deeply interested in it.

And it was, seemingly, at the psychological moment that a SUNDAY TIMES reporter asked Mr. Bok to tell what he thought about the question. Apparently Mr. Bok had been thinking a great deal about it, had much to say, and was quite willing to say it.

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"From your knowledge of American women, do you find that the majority are in favor of woman suffrage or opposed to it?" Mr. Bok was asked.

"Neither. The greater part of American women that my lines have put me in touch with are absolutely indifferent to it. They do not regard the subject as either an important question, or a question at all for that matter. And when they

do write or speak of it an overwhelming percentage are opposed to it and express themselves in no uncertain terms."

"Why, would you say, are they opposed or indifferent to the ballot?"

"Because the average American woman is too busy. Take the average wife or mother who has, say, two or three children and a home of her own. She likes her books, she is fond of music, she may have a taste for pictures. That woman is busy; she has not an idle hour in the day. You cannot interest her in extraneous subjects because there are too many things of a vital nature that are distinctly woman's own questions that take up all her time. And when you talk to her, as I have scores of times, about the ballot she invariably replies: 'Oh, that is for my husband to attend to. That doesn't concern me. I have my own problems that I understand much better and consider myself better to try and solve.' That is the invariable attitude of the average home-loving American woman, and all the suffragists cannot budge her an inch from that position."

"The point is taken by the suffragists, however, that these women would take an interest in civics if they had the right to vote. Do you believe that?"

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"I do not. That is tantamount to saying that the American woman does not know what she wants. And," continued Mr. Bok smilingly, "I pity the



lack of discernment that would say that of the American woman. I have dealt with her now, journalistically, for twenty-five years, and during that time I have come into pretty close touch with American women, their needs and wants, and if there is any person on the face of the earth that knows what she wants it is the American woman. And, more than that, she gets what she wants."

"She could get the ballot, then, you think, if she really wanted it?" the reporter asked.

"Assuredly.

"The opponents to woman suffrage are not men; they are the women themselves. Look back of the adverse legislation for instance, and how do the legislators arrive at a decision to vote as they do against the ballot? A few weeks ago a State bill to allow women to vote was reported unfavorably by a vote of 9 to 2. I wrote to each of those nine legislators and asked them what influenced their vote. In each case they replied that they themselves professed to know nothing of the question, but had referred it to their 'women folks' and 'woman friends,' only to find that there was no demand for the vote among these women and no interest in it. One of the legislators wrote me: 'I felt if the women wanted to vote it was up to us to let them, so I made quite a little canvass of the situation. I asked every woman friend I had and asked my friends to do the same to see how far this desire extended. The result was practically nil. Out of over 150 women I questioned I couldn't find more than ten who had the least desire to vote, and they were, for the most part,

lukewarm. And my fellow-members on the committee, when we came to compare notes, found the same condition of affairs. The women, as a whole, do not seem interested.' And he was right." ended Mr. Bok.

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"This is exactly in line." continued Mr. Bok, "with what I have discovered myself. For instance, not so long ago a President of the United States received the customary 'petition' that is familiar to every President, asking him to incorporate in his next message to Congress a recommendation that the subject of woman suffrage be seriously taken up with the view of giving to woman the right to vote. The President was fair-minded—he was willing to see both sides—so he determined to test the truth of the phrase in the petition that 'this was practically the unanimous desire of American womanhood as a whole,' but that 'men had refused to recognize the fact.'

"That evening he handed the petition to his wife and asked her: 'What do you think of this?'

"'I really don't know,' she answered. 'I have never thought about it.'

"The President was interested. 'But,' he insisted, 'the petition says it is the unanimous desire of American womanhood as a whole!'

"'Perhaps it is,' said the President's wife. 'I am not prepared to say. Why don't you find out?'

"'In what way?' asked the President.

"'Pick fifty women that you know and whose opinions you respect, write to them and ask,' was the reply.

"The President did. There were forty-six answers, four of the women

addressed being ill or absent from the country. Thirty-four had no desire whatever to vote—they either were ‘too busy’ or left politics to their husbands. Eleven were absolutely indifferent. ‘Really, Mr. President, I am not interested,’ voiced the prevailing sentiment; while one lonely lady thought she ‘might vote, but,’ she added, ‘probably when the time came I wouldn’t bother about it!’

“Here, then, were forty-odd intelligent, representative women, and yet not a single one actually wanted the ballot!

“Only a few evenings ago a group of six typical, intelligent American women were talking about this agitation, when I asked them: ‘Suppose the question was put to you to vote upon, how would you vote; in favor of your sex voting or not?’

“The women looked amused, when one voiced the sentiment of the others, as it appeared: ‘Why, we wouldn’t vote—wouldn’t bother about it; it doesn’t interest us.’

“‘But,’ says the suffrage agitator, ‘that is your clinging woman, the ivy kind!’

“Very well. Suppose we take a club of women interested in civics, with a membership of 116. A careful poll was recently taken of the members of this club by the President, who is in favor of woman suffrage, and has upon several occasions talked to the club on the subject, and of a complete vote of 91, 14 were in favor of women voting, 54 decidedly against, and 20 ‘really didn’t care.’

“‘But,’ again says your suffrage agitator, ‘that is only one club. All the women’s clubs would show up

differently!’ But would they? Suppose we see.

“Last Summer in Boston I was introduced into one of the functions of the biennial convention of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and I took particular pains to ask the leading officers and workers of the movement how they believed the Federation, as a whole, stood on the question of woman suffrage. Said one of the principal officers: ‘So overwhelmingly against it that I wouldn’t like to see the Federation place itself on record on the subject.’

“‘You are in favor of a woman’s voting, then?’ I asked.

“‘I am; decidedly,’ she answered. ‘But I know only too well how the Federation, as a body, would express itself.’

“I said to another officer standing by: ‘What do you think?’

“‘Just as Mrs. — does. I have tried it on three clubs in different parts of the country, and I desisted from any further effort.’

“‘Would you mind telling me the ratio?’ I asked.

“‘Oh, it was terrible!’ she answered; ‘80 per cent. against! It was anything but encouraging.’

“I asked another leading worker in the movement—one who has, perhaps, traveled as extensively over the country as any officer of the Federation, and spoken before nearly every principal woman’s club in America. ‘What would be the vote of the Federation on this question? Would you, from your experience, hazard an opinion?’ I asked.

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“‘It isn’t hazarding an opinion. I



know only too well. It would be a Waterloo for me and mine,' she laughingly answered.

" 'You are a suffragist, then?' I asked.

" 'Well, yes,' she replied. 'I suppose I am. I have said so often enough in public. But, somehow or other, I am free to say that whenever I have spoken on the subject I have not been surprised that my arguments have failed to convince. They do not seem convincing to myself.'

" 'I dislike to say it, my dear,' said another woman standing by, 'but I feel as you do. I think the average American woman is pretty nearly right on this question—we had better let voting alone. We don't understand it, and we really wouldn't intelligently understand the questions that we would be asked to vote upon.'

" 'I know I wouldn't,' said a third. 'Besides, I'm too busy with my home and my club work. Why take on anything more? Then, what would we gain that we haven't or that we couldn't get if we wanted? We'd better let well enough alone.'

" 'That,' said Mr. Bok, "fairly illustrates the indifference of the great body of American women to this cry for the ballot. Remember, there is not a man's opinion voiced in these expressions, and on four different occasions upon which they were expressed they represented different classes of women, of varying interests, of wide observation and experience among their sex. And yet not a sign appears there in all the horizon that the wish to vote represents 'practically the unanimous desire of American womanhood as a whole.' On the contrary, it

would certainly appear as if the exact opposite is nearer the truth.

"The simple fact of the matter is that the vast majority of American women have not only no desire to vote, but, to use their own words, they are not 'bothering' about the question; they are 'not even interested.' This is the actual condition that the American woman suffragists confront—not the antagonism of men, for men, as a body, are not antagonistic; they are indifferent, perfectly content to let the women fight this question out among themselves and give them the consensus of opinion. And up to date that consensus is distinctly that the average woman's common sense, and particularly her knowledge of her own sex, teaches her that she is unwilling to run the risks which she knows, far better than men, would accompany an extension of the franchise to her sex.

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"It comes down to this," said Mr. Bok, "that the field of politics as a new excitement for a few restless American women is barred to them by their own sex."

"Is it true, from your own knowledge, that the working class of women want the ballot more than do the women who have homes? That is said, you know."

"If that is so," replied Mr. Bok, "why, then, did only 5 per cent. of the workingwomen of Massachusetts vote that they wanted the ballot when they were asked to express themselves? That wouldn't prove they were so keen to vote. I saw this point practically tested twice within the past month, once in a New York manufactory where they employ 2,000

women and girls. A careful vote was taken, and only 211 asked to vote. In another place, where there are 600 girls and women employed, only 81 wanted to vote. In nearly every case the women asked: 'What do we want to vote for?' You see, when you get this noisy clamor of the suffragists down to a practical test or two, their statements do not seem to hold water.

"But meeting the suffragists on their own contention that the workingwomen want the ballot more than the women who are sheltered in homes, how about these workingwomen when they marry? They seem to overlook the fact that 50 per cent. of the women who work marry at 25 years of age or before; that over two-thirds marry before they reach 35."

"You do not think that the average American woman is attracted to the vote, then, from what has been done in those States where women can vote?"

"How could they be attracted when so little has been done? Now, what has actually been accomplished, say in Colorado? They have raised the age of consent limit. Well, so has Massachusetts, where women can't vote. The suffragists point with pride to Judge Lindsay's Juvenile Court in Denver as the direct result of woman's ballot. No one can say one word save of the highest praise for what Judge Lindsay has done in his splendid work. But would the Denver Juvenile Court have never come into existence save through woman's ballot? Who can say? The fact remains that Chicago has a juvenile court equally as able and effective as the

Denver court. Judge Mack's wonderful work in Chicago every one knows. But women can't vote in Illinois, so surely woman's vote didn't bring about the Chicago Juvenile Court.

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"And how about the juvenile courts in the fourteen other States where they exist to-day and where women cannot vote? I have looked pretty carefully into political and moral conditions in Colorado since women began to vote there. I have had careful inquiries made of women who vote in that State, and I cannot see from what is told me that conditions are a whit better than they were before women voted, and I say this not as my own personal opinion but from what has been written me by Colorado women themselves. Take the question of morals in Denver. Now surely, that is a condition to which women would naturally first of all turn. Only the other day I received a letter from a woman voter in Colorado in which she said 'I believe as strongly as can any woman in the right to vote as a right, but when it comes to the actual net result of her vote I must confess that I see no difference in our condition out here. If immorality was worse than it is now, it certainly must have been pretty bad.'

"One of the most significant facts in my correspondence from women," said Mr. Bok, "since this agitation for woman's suffrage has started, is the number of letters that have come to me from women living in States where woman suffrage exists, and almost invariably these women counsel against its extension. They vote, they say, but how do we vote?' they generally



say. 'Exactly as our menfolk do or tell us to vote.' Again and again they strike the warning note, 'Don't be fooled by what these agitators say of the great work done by women's votes in our State. The great work doesn't exist, except in the minds of those agitators themselves. The code books do not show it; neither our civic nor our moral condition shows it. We wish it did. We believe woman's vote would alter a great many existing evils. But it hasn't, and don't be misled into believing that it has.'

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"Now, this is not from one woman, but from scores who have written me from Colorado, Wyoming, and the other States. } These } women have wanted to believe in the efficiency of the woman's ballot; they asked for it, they exercised the privilege, and now they acknowledge it is without the result they hoped for.

"Look at a woman like Phoebe Couzins. I notice the suffragists never refer to her. But the fact remains that here was one of the leaders of the suffrage movement who fought shoulder to shoulder with Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe, and the rest of them. For twenty-five years she gave up her life to the cause. She spent a year in Colorado, and was one of the leaders in the movement there, and one of the chief spirits in the enactment of the suffrage law in that State. What does she say now of the cause for which she gave up a quarter of a century of her life and of her work in Colorado? She freely acknowledges that she has come to the conviction that the cause of woman suffrage

is not only a mistake but now in the full light of her experience that it would be a positive menace not only to her sex but to the country. There is a keen, brainy woman for you, who certainly knows every nook and corner of the woman suffrage question. The ripe conclusion of a woman of that sort is not to be put lightly aside, you know.

"Then, too," continued the Philadelphia editor, "when it comes to what has actually been accomplished by the woman's vote in the States where it has been tried, I am willing to listen to men who have been and are in a position to judge. Surely President Roosevelt, in his seven years' occupancy of the Presidency, had opportunities for observing what had been done in those States. And he is a believer in woman suffrage. Yet he had to acknowledge that 'I am unable to see that there has been any special improvement in the position of women in those States in the West that have adopted woman suffrage as compared with those States adjoining that have not adopted it.' Certainly Mr. Roosevelt, with his astute political knowledge, his opportunities for observation, his own belief in the ballot for women, would be the first to acknowledge the good that had been done if such were true. And he is not alone. A man like Senator Elihu Root is certainly perceiving, and he stands exactly where Mr. Roosevelt stands.

"Then take such a man as James Bryce, the present English Ambassador. There is certainly a disinterested judge for you; a keen observer of American tendencies and institutions,



thoroughly in sympathy with our every progress, 'No evidence,' he says, 'has come in my way tending to show that politics either in Wyoming or Washington is in any way purer than in the adjoining States and Territories.' There is no getting away from such testimony as those—they come from careful, sane, and authoritative sources, and must be listened to with respect."

"You do not believe, then, that the claim of the suffragists that women would, if allowed to vote, purify politics, is well founded?"

"No, and I say this from the facts and conditions as they exist to-day in the States where the experiment has been tried. You can only go by results. And one of the results in two of these States has been (as women have written to me from those States) to bring into being a species which they call 'hen politicians,' as fully alive to political intrigues and tricks as the most out-and-out type of men politicians, and, if anything, worse. Take my own experience. The President of the company that publishes our magazine has again and again received from Wyoming and Colorado petitions several yards long with hundreds of names attached demanding my removal from the editorial chair. Why? Simply because I did not believe as these suffragists did, and that I said so in the magazine.

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"In Wyoming a number of women suffragists, with a knowledge of laws that needs no comment from me, tried their best to get the Post Office Department to keep our magazine from entering Wyoming through the mails because of our position on the suffrage

question. A committee of three suffragists waited on me once and put before me a proposition that if I would line up our magazine on their side they would at their next convention declare the periodical to be the official organ of their movement, and see to it that every suffragist subscribed to it; that if I persisted in my opposition to their cause they would pass a resolution condemning the magazine, and call upon every believer in woman suffrage to withhold their support.

"What do you call that but politics of the most peanut order, unless you call it attempted blackmail?"

"Take the statement of one of the leaders of the woman suffragist movement herself in New York only the other day, after the defeat of the Suffrage bill at Albany. She delivered a speech calling upon every woman interested in suffrage not to lose heart by the defeat sustained, and particularly emphasized how legislation and politics in general would, when the women's ballot was an actuality, be more chaste, purer, and receive an uplift from the present degrading influences that existed at Albany. And then she closed with a fervent plea that every woman present or interested in woman suffrage should see to it that not a single member of the committee who voted against the measure should be returned to the next Legislature! There's purification of politics for you, and spoken by one of the women foremost in the movement. In other words, we would have pure politics just so long as we believe as these women did and voted as they did. I see no difference in that sort of politics from what we have now."



"You believe, then, we would gain nothing in the way of higher politics as a Nation if women voted?"

"On the contrary, we would lose," emphatically declared Mr. Bok. "For this fundamental reason, as has been shown and is being shown every day where women are employed in business: women cannot lose sight of the personal equation. A woman, first of all and above all, sees everything in the personal, in the concrete; it is her nature, it is constitutional. It is in no respect a charge against her; it is fundamental, inherent, but that very elemental factor in her temperament would lead to a personal element in politics that would be disastrous to parties or policies. Women have confessed to me again and again that were they asked to vote they would invariably, because instinctively, lose sight of measures, no matter what measures they might be, and vote for men.

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"The ballot in woman's hand would bring about a condition of political polemics that would be surprising, even to its present supporters. We would have a feeling not only of sex against sex, of women against men, but you would create a feeling of the sex against itself that would be anything but picturesque. There is no enemy of woman greater than woman herself. A woman is relentless when it comes to her own sex. There are few women who really like their own sex, who have any use whatever for women as a whole. They like women in the concrete, but not in the mass, and woe be to any people or condition that

makes it possible for a woman to take it out of her sex."

"But how about the ballot as woman's right?" Mr. Bok was asked.

"The ballot is not a right for any woman any more than it is for a man. It is a privilege fixed by age, by residence, by educational qualification, that is conferred by a community upon an individual. But it never becomes a natural right; it always remains a prerogative. The argument constantly is put forth that because a woman pays taxes she should have a right to vote. That is not so. If that were so, I have a right to vote in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, for I pay taxes in all three States. Suppose some shiftless incompetent is put up as Governor of New York, and I protest with all my being against his election, and I walk into New York City and cast a ballot because I feel I have a right as a property holder and a tax-payer to say who shall or shall not be Governor of the State wherein my property lies—what would happen to me? I have no actual, no natural, right to vote anywhere, because a vote is not a right. The power to vote is granted to me, and it is granted upon conditions. It is for the State, the community, to say who shall have the right to cast a ballot, and when a man or a woman insists upon it as a right he or she is just a shade beside the facts."

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"What about the charge that women cannot do their work in the world without the dignity that the ballot would give them?"

"Dignity, bosh!" was the impatient response. "This idea that woman



cannot do her work in the world without the right of suffrage is all rubbish. Just take the statement of a woman who is now very prominent in this suffrage excitement in New York. She says, in print, that if women were given the ballot they would immediately seek to ameliorate the hardships of the women among the working classes and 'uplift the asylums and hospitals,' whatever that may mean. That, she says, would be enough to keep a generation of American women busy. It would, indeed. But why doesn't she get busy? How can woman's vote help the wage-earning woman?

"It didn't require woman's vote to induce the Supreme Court of the United States to give its recent humane decision declaring that the limiting of woman's hours at work was constitutional, and giving her a special right because of her sex to a protection that did not apply to her fellow-male worker.

"It didn't require the power to vote to lead Mrs. Vanderbilt to decide to build her tuberculosis tenements for the poor. The hundreds of women who are every day working and have been working for the betterment of our asylums and prisons and hospitals didn't fold their hands, or get on the stage of a theatre and say, 'Give us a vote, and we will do our work.' They did not pose as martyrs, as creatures bereft of a right; they went to work and are at work every day and every night.

"The great trouble with the suffragists is that they regard the ballot as a cure-all for every evil that exists. They seem not to be able to grasp the

salient fact that legislation will right the evils they talk about more effectively than will the ballot, and that what cannot be done through legislation it is mighty hard, if not impossible, to do by ballot. A woman has a thousand times more influence before a legislative body of men when she appears before them in a cause that they know she knows and feels than through all the ballots that she can cast.

"Take one prominent statement constantly made by suffragists: that an equal ballot will bring about an equal wage for both sexes. To make a statement such as that shows how far woman is removed from the accurate knowledge of affairs that would make here a safe voter. For every man knows that the question of an equal wage is not a political question, or a theme for the question or a theme for ballot box; it is a pure economic question, and has to be reached through economic sources.

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"But if the ballot for women can bring about an equal wage, why hasn't it done so in Colorado, or Idaho, or Wyoming? Do women there receive an equal wage with men?"

"How do you interpret this increased agitation that has arisen on this subject of late, particularly in New York City?"

"In one way as the natural outcome of the unfeminine rumpus in England, of course. That gave the suffragists here a chance, and they took advantage of it to bring the excitement over here. I am inclined to believe, however, with regard to this English excitement over woman suf-



frage that the desire for the ballot is not so general over there as we are led to suppose. I was over there last October and was surprised myself to meet the number of women who had no desire to vote. I had been led to believe myself that the excitement over there was really a widespread movement, but Mrs. Humphry Ward assured me it was not so at all, and Frederic Harrison, who is very closely in touch with English conditions, says the same. It is another case, apparently, of a lot of noise made by a few—in larger numbers, I believe, than here, yet at the same time not expressive of the majority of English women, a number of whom smiled when I asked them if they wanted to vote."

"Then you do not think that this movement here has any special significance?" asked the reporter.

"Yes, I do," answered Mr. Bok. "But I notice you call it a movement. It is not that. It is an excitement, an outbreak, an expression, and, to my mind, an unnatural expression of an unnatural condition that goes much deeper than mere woman suffrage."

"What would you say is that unnatural condition?"

"There is an old Swedish saying that reflects this situation pretty well. It is 'what we are pursuing is really only a runaway horse attached to our wagon.' Now woman, by her very nature, is a personification of nervous energy, of emotion; of sentiment. That nervous energy and emotion were given her for expression in her natural channels—that of motherhood. And when she reaches that expression she finds ample outlet for all her nervous

energy. But for a number of years there has grown up in America a dangerous type of woman, a woman who, misunderstanding the modern currents of thought, has believed that her work in the world lay outside of the home or who for some reason or other has developed a positive aversion to motherhood.

"The feeling of love in this type of woman seems to be stunted; in some cases they ask for love but not motherhood. They consider children as a hindrance to their own greatest development; they believe that by paying their natural tribute to their sex and doing the greatest work in the world that a woman can do they would lose a certain power of brilliancy for themselves. It is notable in the sense that they want the freedom of the man to go about as he does and not be tied down; to take their part in the work of the world, which under a mistaken sense they think they were created to do. They are working out for a fancied equality; an equality that they cannot see is impossible because of the inequality which nature itself has created, and which, if it is made an equality, always brings about the injury of the weaker factor.

"This aversion to motherhood, this unwillingness to be a woman in the highest sense of the word, leaves the woman unsatisfied; it leaves her with her nervous energies unspent. So, for what she cannot find a natural outlet in her home, she goes outside, looks around for what is going on, and plunges into the first excitement that she meets. It may be bridge; it may be vivisection; it may be woman's clubs; it may be woman suffrage.

"She must have an outlet—any outlet save the natural outlet. She hasn't enough to do; her hands are idle, her mind is not full—to be frank, her lap is not full. This whole movement was well expressed by a prominent supporter of woman's rights not long ago when she said that 'celibacy is the aristocracy of the future.' They changed it in Chicago to the cry, 'No ballot, no babies.' Another suffragist simply said that 'it was far more important for a woman to be a woman than to be a mother.' No matter how they phrase it, there is always the same undercurrent; the same basic aversion to motherhood.

"You can always seek growth of one movement by a corresponding excitement on the other extreme. And this whole tendency toward an aversion to motherhood on the part of one element of restless American womanhood has brought about a corresponding keenness on the part of another and larger element of American wom-

anhood toward a close study of the conditions of childhood in America. You can see the signs of this on every hand; more attention is being given to the physical, mental, and moral questions of childhood than ever before; my mail from women is full of it; it is safe to say that seven out of every ten letters we get, of a serious order, ask some question about children. It is in the air, and the whole movement is coming naturally out of the people, where all great movements come from, and where woman suffrage does not come from.

"That is an excitement of the restless few; the question of the child is a great operating movement, being born of the many. That is the great ethical question we are facing: the future of the child, and in comparison with it, so far as the real interest and deep anxiety of the American woman as a sex is concerned, the question of woman suffrage fades into absolute insignificance."